Labour, Migrancy and Urbanization in South Africa and India, 1900–60

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Abstract

This article compares labour migrancy and urbanization in several of the leading cities of South Africa and India. It begins by noting the pervasiveness of single male oscillating labour migration between rural areas and city employment in both societies up until the 1950s, despite fundamentally different institutional and political arrangement in each state. It highlights and explores the issues of social structure and culture in both societies, both pre-colonial and colonial, in explaining the dynamics of migrancy and urbanization, including which sections of village society migrated and with what effects. The article explores different modes of living in and adapting to urban environments, and particularly the different social trajectory of women and youth in both societies and the implications of each for social stability. It finally asks why historians and other social scientists have adopted such distinctive approaches to each society.

Keywords juvenile delinquency (South Africa and India) • labour migrancy • migrant culture • urbanization • women’s migration/urbanization

Migrant labour, or more specifically the migrant labour system, has been identified by a broad spectrum of liberal and radical social scientists as the core institution of South Africa’s 20th-century political economy. It has been credited with underpinning white prosperity and white supremacy alike; white prosperity in the sense that the ultra-cheap ‘bachelor’ wages that could be paid to oscillating African labour migrants who left their families behind in the African reserves guaranteed impressive profits for both gold mining and later other industries, which were, by various mechanisms, spread across most sectors of white society; white supremacy because migrancy prevented Africans from settling in the bastions of white power in the towns and allowed the denial of political rights to virtually all Africans outside the reserves. In the majority of these accounts labour migrancy has been pictured as being either constrained...
or coerced. Land alienation, finally ratified by the 1913 Land Act, confined Africans to 8.7 per cent of South Africa’s land, thereby precluding or inhibiting the independent reproduction of families in the reserves. Poll tax which eventually climbed to £1.10.0 a year in 1925 and could only be paid in cash, forced Africans on the migrant labour market to earn wages, and a host of mechanisms such as the recruiting monopoly instituted by the Chamber of Mines in the early 20th century, the maximum average wage system by which members of the Chamber of Mines agreed to place a ceiling on the aggregate African wage bill, the labour contract system which imposed criminal sanctions for breaches of it, single-sex compounds to accommodate migrants and passes between them capped migrant earnings and prevented them from creeping up over time (Wolpe, 1972; Johnstone, 1976; Legassick, 1977). As a result, as Francis Wilson (1972: 46) famously observed, African gold miners’ wages remained static in real terms between the early 1900s and the late 1960s.

This somewhat stark and instrumental view of the role of migrant labour in South Africa’s political economy has been given greater nuance in important respects in the last 20 or so years. Scholars have traced the emergence of partly self-sustaining migrant cultures whereby migrancy acquired a positive moral valency in the societies which gave it birth and was propagated as a life goal among youth who were about to follow that path (Stichter, 1985: 12–18). At no point nevertheless did these scholars minimize the significance of the overarching institutional structure that gave labour migrancy in South Africa its peculiar cast.

The challenge that the Indian comparison presents to South African scholarship is that it discloses an equally entrenched migrant labour system but shorn of its characteristic logic and institutions. Single-male migrancy dominated the Indian labour market during its formative phases, and was set in place without the complex political apparatus and range of coercive interventions that was the apparent prerequisite of its South African counterpart.

This article will focus its attention on India’s premier industrial cities, Bombay (now Mumbai) and Calcutta (now Kolkata) and South Africa’s conurbation of the Witwatersrand. A number of excursions will also be undertaken into the urban milieux of Delhi, Madras (now Chennai), Nagpur, Bangalore, Ahmedabad, Surat, Pune and South Africa’s Durban. It builds on and overlaps with a previous study of mine published in the journal Studies in History (Bonner, 2004a).

Labour Migrancy in India

Indian nationalist historical orthodoxy of the mid-20th century saw the movement of labour to cities as the outcome of inexorable processes of underdevelopment and exploitation set in motion by British colonial rule. In this
view, land taxes, deindustrialization and a measure of commercialization combined to expel impoverished artisans and peasants to the cities in a relatively uncomplicated and one-way fashion (Patel, 1952). Migration from this perspective was an interim phase. Increasingly permanent urbanization was assumed to be the outcome, much as had been the case in Europe and the USA (Joshi and Joshi, 1976: 1–17). This view came under challenge in the 1950s and 1960s, following the mass rural–urban migration of the decade 1941–51. Rural pressures underlying the movement were now seen as being located at least as much within the complex internal dynamics of Indian village society as in external impositions (e.g. Breman, 1974; Kumar, 1989). At the same time, migrancy came to be understood not just as an interim phase but as a semi-permanent condition. A near deluge of studies in the 1960s and 1970s showed the working population in India’s two leading industrial cities, Bombay and Calcutta, as still consisting overwhelmingly of migrants – 84 per cent in the case of Bombay in 1961, with other major urban centres displaying the same characteristics (see for instance Sen, 1960; Zachariah, 1968). Moreover, the highly skewed sex ratios exhibited by both the leading industrial cities suggested that a large proportion of these migrant workers had left their wives and families at home in their villages, and had little inclination to opt for a permanent settled urban way of life.1

Labour Migrancy in South Africa

Labour migrancy passed through at least three stages in late 19th and early 20th century South Africa. Prior to conquest, taxation and large-scale land alienation, young men migrated more or less voluntarily to work in South Africa’s employment centres, particularly the mines. A second phase followed in the 1890s and early 1900s when the costs of deep-level mining spiralled upwards and demanded that wage levels be forced down to under half their former level, that huge drafts of unskilled African labour be continuously supplied, and that this labour be disciplined, mainly in compounds, to ensure that it worked a constant eight-hour day, thereby providing an adequate return on investment. (For Indian examples see Alexander, 2007.) At some point following or overlapping the imposition of this apparatus of coercion and regulation, a third phase was reached whereby the supply of migrant labour reproduced itself without any further intervention.

One material factor contributing to this outcome was population growth. African society, including that part of it located in the reserves, was gripped by growing morbidity from diseases such as tuberculosis, syphilis, malaria and many others, but in a shift largely unrecognized in the literature, rates of mortality declined. Why this was so has still to be adequately explained, but the end result is clear; population levels inexorably mounted, pressure on land
increased and spells of migrancy became an inescapable feature of black South African rural life (Beinart, 1994: 202, 354).

At this stage, if not before, African societies themselves became active collaborators in the exercise. A spell of migrancy became incorporated in the typical life cycle of young African men. The critical role of such cultures of migrancy was only fully recognized at the beginning of the 1970s when the Mayers published their path-breaking study *Townsmen or Tribesmen?* and pointed to the singular contribution that could be made by the discipline of social anthropology, with its preoccupation with culture, to the comprehension of social change in black South Africa (Mayer and Mayer, 1971). Within a decade, a clutch of pioneering historical studies by young revisionist historians of South Africa had begun to break out of the straightjacket of structuralist Marxism to document the role of African agency in the perpetuation of migrant labour systems. As these revealed, migrant cultures demanded submission to a migrant moral code, which required migrants to encapsulate themselves in ‘homeboy’ networks in the urban employment centres and to insulate themselves as completely as possible from the corrupting influences of the towns. The central injunction of this moral code was that migrants *should return home* and regularly, at that. What such studies exposed was a yawning gap in prior analyses, which had never been satisfactorily answered: why did migrants go back home (Harries, 1994: 81–108; Delius, 1996: 21–4)?

Accessing these cultures (as well as those of groups and individuals who peeled off of the land and settled permanently in the towns) became prime goals of South African social historians, as well as a number of anthropologists and ethno-musicologists. The main means by which they sought to illuminate this subject was through the collection of oral testimonies, above all in the form of life histories, which shed light on a wide spectrum of life experiences. Among the reasons for their ready and indeed enthusiastic, resort to such sources were a prior ‘Africanist’ phase of collecting oral traditions, and the comparative dearth of written texts documenting from an African vantage point a deep as well as a more recent African past (although African vernacular newspapers remain strangely unexplored). Another crucial route to tapping otherwise hidden or buried migrant (and immigrant) experiences and culture was that offered by the discipline of ethno-musicology in the form of music, song and dance. Clegg and Erlmann investigated changing dance and musical forms to illuminate the way in which successive generations of youths refashioned migrant cultures in Zululand and Natal (today KwaZulu-Natal) (Clegg, 1984; Erlmann, 1996: 84–7). Coplan and Ballantine examined a multiplicity of musical forms and verses to plot a proliferation of migrant and immigrant subcultures in the towns (Coplan, 1985; Ballantine, 1993).

The moral codes of migrant cultures were instilled through elders, families, peers and above all through the rite of initiation. A fascinating example of the importance of this ‘rite de passage’ can be found in the hills of Makgabeng in the
north-west of today’s Limpopo province. In shelters scattered along gorges, initiation schools were held. Initiates were instructed in the need to go out to labour, to return and reinvest in home, and to avoid urban women. A central visual symbol painted on countless shelter walls in these gorges was the train, packed with migrants, puffing its way south to the Rand. The moral load of this image was both the necessity and extreme dangers and vulnerabilities of migrancy. It was an image initiates would never forget (for a tour and discussion of Makgabeng shelters see Jonas Ngeaka Thlouamma, 2006: 10–11).

So effective were these cultural silos that encapsulated migrant worlds that migrant youth cultures persisted in the single-male migrant hostels of the Witwatersrand up until the late 1990s, when research that Vusi Ndima and I conducted revealed that youth deference to elders and migrant moral codes was still so deeply embedded that youths handed over their entire wages to the elders for safe-keeping thereby rendering inaccessible the corrupting influences of the towns (Bonner and Ndima, 2008).

**Labour Migrancy in India: Some Causes**

Labour migrancy to Bombay and Calcutta bear certain resemblances to each other. Early arrivals on the labour market tended to be drawn from the immediate hinterland of each city. Long distance migrants made a significant entrance into the workplace of either city in the late 19th century only. In both instances the bulk of the new arrivals hailed from the Eastern United Provinces (subsequently Uttar Pradesh) and Bihar, both situated deep in the interior. In the case of Calcutta, an additional source of long distance migration was the state of Orissa to the south (Zachariah, 1968: 50–5; Chandavarkar, 1994: 129, 146–8; de Haan, 1994: 92, 96).

What drove these rural populations to undertake such journeys to the towns? First, as a number of path-breaking studies have now made clear, it is necessary to problematize the notion of migrancy as well as to deepen our historical time frame. As Ajuha states, most writings on the colonial period tend to disconnect India’s pre-colonial from its colonial past (Ajuha, 2002). The pre-colonial period is pictured as harmonious, self-sufficient and communitarian, as well as anchored in particular localities, thereby denying any strong sense of mobility and change. As Breman (1985), Ludden (1996) and Kerr (2006) have pointed out, this picture is fundamentally misleading. Ludden (1996: 109) asserts that half of India’s population in the 18th century would have been made up of mobile people ranging from seasonal migrants to hunters to herders living out lives in ‘a terrain of perpetual movement’. Kerr (2006: 93–6) remarks on the activities of construction workers (known to the British as Tank Diggers or Wudders) who were the most numerous group of migrant workers since pre-colonial times, travelling repeatedly from countryside to town or town to town. Washbrook (1993), who subtitles his article ‘The Golden Age of
the Pariah?’, contends that spatial mobility was as prevalent as sedentarism in pre-colonial India. Such itinerant groups, these studies agree, were perceived as actual or potential threats to social stability and political security in colonial India, and a variety of legal mechanisms were instituted to settle and ‘peasantize’ them (Osella and Gardner, 2004: xiii–xvii). Since access to rural resources was invariably inadequate to sustain family life, such a pre-existing life of ‘circulatory’ migration had to be replaced by oscillatory migration to centres of colonial employment, something more predictable and less threatening than itinerancy. From this perspective the very process of sedentarization in colonial India yielded some of the sources of colonial labour supply. Other forms of migration and mobility also pre-dated colonialism in India or arose in the early period of colonial rule (i.e. up to mid-19th century). De Haan believes that the principal streams of migrant recruitment to the jute mills of Calcutta (specifically Titagarth) followed previously established routes or had earlier precedents. The Bhojpur region of Uttar Pradesh and especially the Saran district, for example, which provided one of the earliest and most consistent sources of labour supply for the Calcutta mills, had contributed massive numbers of Sepoys to the company armed forces (10,000) in the first half of the 19th century, while subsequently large numbers of residents migrated each year to cut crops in East Bengal for several months of the year, both long before the first jute mill was erected in Calcutta (de Haan, 1994: 102, 105). Similarly, the Gurundi area of Ganjam in Orissa, which contributed another substantial and concentrated stream of migrants to Calcutta’s mills, had furnished the bulk of the militias to the Rajas in pre-colonial times, in another instance of pre-colonial labour mobility or migration (de Haan, 1994: 107). Other factors, no doubt, induced or impelled such flows of migration to Calcutta’s jute mills or other centres of colonial employment, of which more will be said later, but since none of the prime supply areas was noticeably poorer or more weighed down by landlessness than its neighbours, it seems that this prehistory to industrial migration must weigh significantly in the balance (de Haan, 1994: 102, 106; see also Breman, 1996: 62 for Ganjam dominance over Orissa migrants to Surat). A similar exercise of plotting pre-colonial patterns of mobility might well open up rich new analytical perspectives on the roots of labour migrancy in Southern Africa. The same tendency is present in literature too, and pictures 18th-century African societies as localized, isolated and anchored. Yet long-standing processes and patterns of mobility may have been being built on to construct the earliest migrant networks, only to be subsequently obscured from view.

The mounting privations experienced by rural households were equated in several studies published in late colonial and early post-colonial India with the rise of the landless rural labourer. Patel (1952) claimed, on the basis of census records, that the number of agricultural labourers in village India soared from 13 per cent to 38 per cent of the rural population between 1871 and 1931,
prompted by deindustrialization, ruralization and population pressure. Both the Thorners (1962) and Krishnamurty (1993) subsequently subjected the census categories to more rigorous scrutiny and concluded that the increase in the number of landless labourers was insignificant in this period, a view which now seems broadly accepted. Nevertheless, even a figure of 20 per cent landless is large and suggests a prima facie explanation for the ever-expanding streams of labour migrants from the rural areas to the cities. Common sense in this case, however, conceals and misleads. As a substantial corpus of historical writings now shows, the totally landless and the most abjectly poor were the least likely to join the streams of migration to perform industrial labour. Made up of ‘tribals’ such as those on the Chotra Nagpur plateau who were dispossessed of their land rights in the mid-19th century and already landless outcasts, these were incorporated in the lowest categories of agricultural societies (Bhattacharya, 1993; Chandavarkar, 1994: 145; Breman, 1996: 24–189).

This is not to say that urban industrial employers did not wish to exploit their vulnerable conditions, or that they did not desire to set in place the lineaments of a migrant labour system analogous to that which subsequently developed in South Africa. Joshi (1985) shows how factory managers in Kanpur actively sought to recruit cheap labour from communities, described as ‘habitually criminal’ under the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, and campaigned for state intervention to help identify potential labour ‘catchment’ areas and prevent the absconding of new recruits (particularly those from ‘criminal tribes’). Such efforts only ended in the 1920s when migrant labour became routinized. Joshi also records that managers possessed the legal power to prosecute workers for breach of contract under an Act of 1859, a law which the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and jute manufacturers association sought to have extended to themselves (Sen, 1999: 38), but were unable to enforce this. Joshi then alerts us to an absolutely critical variable in this regard distinguishing India from some other colonial societies. Unlike the West Indies (to which one could obviously add South Africa), ‘the state did not respond enthusiastically to management pleas for intervention’ (Joshi, 2003: 77–8). The old South Africa’s structural Marxist preoccupation with the nature of the relationship between capitalism in this context acquires renewed salience, raising questions about why the State was so less accommodating to capital in India (for South Africa see Bonner, 1993: 36, notes 4 and 5).

As a clutch of studies assembled and edited by Prakash (1993) demonstrate, landless labourers by no means encompass or exhaust the category of rural poverty. A common feature of all of the migrant-labour exporting regions was what Banaji (1993) describes as the formal subsumption of labour in rural areas through the exploitation of the small peasantry by money-lending and land-owning capital from the mid-19th century. Such ‘depeasantization’ to use Chaudhuri’s (1993) term, whereby peasants continued to operate land (via share-cropping, for example) over which they had lost occupancy rights, allows
us, so Prakash (1993: 23) contends, to open up the category of agricultural labourers to include penurious indebted small peasants. A further pressure driving rural populations into agricultural labour and migration, to which Chandavarkar (1994: 146), among others, draws attention, was the decline of handloom weaving and other forms of artisan production, such as potting, in the face of the onslaught of factory-produced textiles and imported metal goods, which became especially fierce in the last quarter of the 19th century. It should be noted, nevertheless, that the prime casualties of this process were Indian women who did not migrate (Sen, 1999).

It was these partly proletarianized peasants who retained ownership of inadequate parcels of land or some access to land via other means that made up the bulk of the stream of migrant labourers to the towns. Their conditions, as de Haan (1994: 118) notes, varied enormously; some people ‘who seem to be proletarian in the city [at home are] often not’. Status, caste and material resources between them provided a cushion of social and material capital, which secured access to the most prized industrial jobs (the most prized of which was a permanent contract). The worse off one was in the country, the worse off one was in the town (see Breman, 1996: 43).

A bewildering diversity of local circumstances, local tenurial arrangements and local relationships of authority and subordination render risky almost any generalization about the changing states of rural India. Two will, however, be ventured here since they were influential in both India and South Africa and underlay many of the changes previously noted. These are the commercialization of agriculture (dealt with above) and population growth. Across India, the population climbed steadily from the early-19th to the mid-20th centuries. Between 1820 and 1872, the population of the Ratnagiri districts of the Konkan, from which most of Bombay’s labour was extruded, grew from just under half a million to over a million. Massive subdivision of agricultural holdings ensued. Similarly, in the Deccan, the population climbed by 27.5 per cent between 1891 and 1941, while the cropped area grew by a meagre 6.6 per cent only, with similar results (Guha, 1985: 86–7; Chandavarkar, 1994: 47, 141). Rowe’s (1973: 227) case study of the village of Senapur in eastern Uttar Pradesh reveals a similar pattern, with its population doubling between 1910 and 1970, leaving agricultural land overworked and giving lower yields. The conclusion thus seems inescapable. It has been the long durée of demographic growth that caused India’s rural population to spill over in ever-increasing numbers to the cities.

Two broad reasons can be advanced for this steady upward trend in population growth. First, although famines struck India devastatingly in the 1870s and 1890s, and bubonic plague repeatedly ravaged the continent between 1891 and 1911, the truly massive famines and epidemics all but vanished from view over the next 50 years (the last major Indian famine prior to the Bengal famine of 1943 struck in 1919) (Ghurye, 1974: 185; de Haan, 1994: 109 note 54).
Second, urban employment and urban wages supplemented village subsistence and cushioned peasant families from periodic agricultural disasters. This, of course, presumes a pattern of seasonal migrancy and the retention of the migrants’ links to the village. It was the prevalence of this pattern of seasonal migrancy that led Rowe (1973: 226) to conclude that ‘in direct contradiction to the claim that “the city will destroy the village”, it is our finding that, in economic terms at least, the city makes the continuance of the North Indian village possible’. Famine, more so than its converse, sufficiency, also affected labour migrancy in one other way. Famines were frequently the trigger initially propelling groups of workers into oscillating migrancy, thereby establishing the first bridgeheads to the towns (de Haan, 1994: 108–9; Breman, 1996: 641; Joshi, 2003: 81).

Labour Migrancy in India: Some Dynamics

Our core question nevertheless still remains: why, in the absence of institutional compulsions or controls such as those which existed in most of 20th-century South Africa, did Indian workers devote so much energy to sustaining a rural base? Low wages, job insecurity, irregular work and a shortage of adequate and affordable accommodation all contributed towards this inclination. Chakrabarty (1989: 208–9) records ‘short-term service’ punctuated by regular periods of unemployment to be the standard pattern in the jute industry of Calcutta. Chandavarkar (1994: 73–123) shows casual labour as being common in all sectors of industry in Bombay, along with intense competition for what employment there was, as a result of a large surplus labour pool in the city (for Calcutta see Sen, 1999). It was in this context, as a number of writers have observed, that it became imperative to maintain the safety net offered by rural connections. As Patel (1963: 37) noted of Ratnagiri in the 1960s, a base in the village provided ‘an invaluable security in times of unemployment, severe economic distress, old age and the like’.

However, the safety net offered by rural connections was not woven exclusively of rural threads. Rural kin, caste and village connections were also transposed into the city where they were deployed to find jobs and accommodation for new migrants and to provide various kinds of support or credit for those temporarily unemployed. A key component of this network was the labour recruiter or subcontractor known as the sirdar in Calcutta, the mistri in Kanpur and the jobber in Bombay. He recruited groups of workers, usually on a kin, caste or village basis either at the rural base or in an urban working-class neighbourhood. He was responsible for delivering workers to the factory and for supervising and disciplining labour at the point of production. In some instances he rented out rooms to migrant workers in his group. Generally, he shared a common rural origin with the workers he hired (Newman, 1981; Joshi, 1985: 252–4, 265–6; Chakrabarty, 1989: 907–1115).
The practice of urban leaseholding in Bombay and Calcutta (which bears comparison to that operating in the inner-city slum yards of Johannesburg in the early decades of the 20th century (Koch, 1983)) encouraged rack renting by leaseholders and an escalation of rents. Rentals for single rooms were commonly a third more than ordinary workers could afford (Chandavarkar, 1994: 176). This in itself constituted a strong incentive to remain migrant, since the only way for workers to afford accommodation was through various forms of sharing (see Bulsara, 1964: 64–5, 1970: 283–90; Gore, 1970: 75; Breman, 1996: 51; Joshi, 2003: 106).

Surplus labour, irregular employment and low wages made kinship, village and related urban neighbourhood solidarities indispensable for migrants. One unemployed ‘upcountry’ worker told the Royal Commission into Labour in 1931 that he would live for months in working-class slums with the support of relatives and on credit from the sirdar until he ultimately found a job (Chakrabarty, 1989: 210). Other sources of credit were the local bania (grain dealer) and in the final resort the feared Pathan (who are now known as Pashtuns) (Chandavarkar, 1994: 189–92). These same constraints also dictated residential distribution. A common pattern across all of India’s industrial cities has been residence close to the place of work. For these reasons, slums became an increasingly conspicuous feature of Indian cities as the 20th century wore on (Sen, 1960: 158; Gore, 1970: 110; Breman, 1996: 51; de Haan, 2004: 193). The location of slums was closely related to the distribution of employment opportunities. Here, the urban geography of India was strikingly at variance with that of South Africa. As Sen (1960: 161) remarks of Calcutta: ‘The slum areas are not concentrated in separate areas like the East End of London. They are to be found scattered all over the city, fashionable houses and bustees side by side’ (see also Namibiar, 1970: 182–98, 201–9, 219; Majumdar and Majumdar, 1978: 1–31; Lewandowski, 1980: 44–5; Kumble, 1982: 9–44; Rao, 1990: 22–8).

Breman observes that such abject conditions and shortages of houses acted as a powerful disincentive to workers bringing their wives and families to the town or even to visit. As one of his interviewees put it, ‘Where would she have to sleep?’ On this issue Breman goes further, offering an interesting parallel perspective to some of the dominant lines of interpretation of South African migrancy. ‘The refusal to implement a housing policy [by the government and municipalities]’ he sees as ‘a conscious effort to keep the lowest ranks of the urban economy mobile and to shift their reproduction cost as much as possible to the rural hinterland’ (Breman, 1996: 40–1).

One notable parallel and one striking difference between Indian and South African urbanization stand out from the foregoing review. The first is that a low-wage migrant labour system evolved and reproduced itself in the Indian context without the benefit of the institutional apparatus evident in South Africa. The second is that residential segregation, which with few exceptions was the rule for 20th-century South Africa, was largely absent in Indian cities; a difference that reflected the different places in the colonial order occupied by India and South
Africa. In contrast to India, South Africa was a colony of white settlement. South African governments always saw the cities as likely sites for the subversion of white supremacy, either through racial mixing in slums or so-called black ‘detribalization’ (Jochelson, 2001: 21–66, 98–166). A near constant theme in South African urban governance was the desire to regulate movement to the towns through influx and efflux controls, and to assign a large section of the African workforce the status of migrants (Davenport, 1970, 1971). It was the absence of any similar kind of endeavour in India that allowed for large surpluses of urban labour and the proliferation of urban slums, which in turn provided the material and social underpinnings of migrant labour. In South Africa, by contrast, the requirements of white supremacy and particularly the quest for white towns meant that an elaborate institutional apparatus was needed to complement or substitute the social and economic forces present in Indian villages and cities.

**South Africa – Culture, Gender and Urbanization**

South Africa has a relatively foreshortened history of urbanization compared to India, as well as a less complex and gradated rural social structure. Initially, it was educated converts to Christianity who settled with their families in the towns. Like Tamil migrants to Pune, they went there in search of better-paying, white-collar jobs or self-employment and practised a culture of what Bozzoli and Goodhew term ‘respectability’ (Bozzoli, 1991: 122–228; Goodhew, 2004: 199; see also Bonner with Nieftagodien, 2008: chs 1–3 for Alexandra examples). In the 1920s and 1930s these relatively sedate early residents were overlain and overwhelmed by a second surge of black immigration issuing mainly from white farms who carried with them markedly different cultural baggage and constructed a strikingly different cultural milieu.

The growing exodus of farm labourers/labour tenants from the farms was prompted by two developments. First, greatly reduced access to land for labour tenants whether for agriculture or for stock along with steadily mounting labour demands by the white owner. This obviously bears comparison with the Indian experience. Second, a series of searing droughts which scoured the countryside between 1927 and 1934 and then after the Second World War, which were not paralleled in Indian agricultural history.

The 1932–4 drought shook rural society to its foundations, loosening bonds of servitude and dependence. Refugees from drought swarmed into small rural towns where few found work, and then in many cases drifted on to the major industrial centres. Once the drought broke late in 1933, farmers likewise sought to recoup their losses by increasing their output and placed intensified demands on their tenants. Many tenants having been shaken loose from the land over the preceding drought period refused to comply and sought work on a permanent basis in the towns. In 1936 official reports estimated that out of 100 aspiring workers arriving in Johannesburg each day, 20 were from the farms.
What is particularly striking about the pattern of immigration was its generationally skewed character, which is not nearly so evident or well documented in the Indian case. Generally young men and women moved first. The most common first step outside the farms for the sons and daughters of labour tenants was to seek temporary domestic work in the neighbouring small towns or local mines. As the 1930s progressed, these short-haul moves were followed by more distant and protracted visits to the main industrial centres. At this point the labour of the sons and daughters of the labour tenant was often permanently lost both to the family and to the farmers he served (Bonner, 2004b).

Much of reserve society and migrant culture was still holding intact at this point, but in some areas it was fraying at the edges. The principal victims and most marginalized sections of the reserve population were African women, above all those living in the most impoverished reserves of the Ciskei and Basutoland. Ciskei was an area distinguished by extreme shortages of land. There polygamy became increasingly uncommon, while high rates of bride wealth in increasingly costly cattle meant that even monogamous marriages were difficult and had to be delayed. As Mager (1999: 75) remarks, ‘reduced cattle numbers meant that men and women endured a protracted liminal period between youth and adulthood’, one index of which was the rising average age of marriage for both women and men between the 1890s and 1940s (19 to 23 for women; 24 to 30 for men). These developments had a profoundly corrosive effect on rural life, which was reproduced in several analogous rural contexts such as Basutoland. First, young women were encouraged to elope or, more seriously, were abducted (Bonner, 1990: 234–7) all too often to be subsequently abandoned (Mager, 1999: 70) by the man. Second, the expanded gap between sexual maturity and marriage increased the scope for illicit sexual liaisons leading to growing numbers of single mothers and illegitimate children (Mager, 1999: 139). Third, such single and abandoned women, along with widows, were denied access to/or inheritance of land and lived an increasingly marginal existence ‘on the fringes of patriarchal society’. Fourth, and critically, these and other women came to be valued, in Mager’s telling phrase, more for their sexuality than their fertility (1999: 87) and also became highly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse (1999: 75, 87, 128, 193–4). Fifth, the numbers of widows sky-rocketed partly resulting from the growing age discrepancy between husbands and wives (1999: 181).

Pressure on rural subsistence, matched by unprecedented bursts of industrial expansion in the 1930s and 1940s, drew an unprecedented number of men into industrial employment. Many brought their wives and families to the town, but a large (if indeterminate) proportion of the urban female population continued to consist of single (if previously married) women. Between them these were responsible for the numbers of urban women climbing by 79.95 per cent between 1936 and 1946 compared to 46.8 per cent for men, resulting in a
seismic shift in urban sex ratios (Posel, 1991: 24) which began to level off. The scale and composition of the inflow constitutes one of the major differences between the pattern of Indian and South African urbanization, which raises intriguing questions of both the South African and the Indian literatures.

Drought and the various vicissitudes experienced by white farms also expelled increasing numbers of poor whites into the urban areas. First to leave were bywoners (tenant/share-cropper families) displaced by disease, drought and the South African War of 1899–1902. These bear a close resemblance in several respects to early migrants to Indian towns. The scale of the movement grew in the 1920s and 1930s, when farm owners came under increasing pressure from commoditization, rising farm prices and drought (Bonner with Nieftagodien, 2008). Poor white farmers would often despatch their young daughters to the cities first, for whom growing numbers of low-paying jobs were available in the expanding light industry sector (Hyslop, 1995: 61–4). Poor white men and women alike would congregate in the mixed-race inner-city slums prompting a rising tide of moral panic about physical and mental degeneration, thriftlessness and sexual profligacy and a generally ‘demoralising and corrupt intercourse with non-Europeans’ (cited in Chanock, 2001: 204–5). Venereal diseases, Jochelson (2001: 22–31) writes, ‘encapsulated anxiety about the physical and mental deterioration of the nation’. The slums, or ‘racial borderlands’, were perceived as especially threatening and the Achilles heel of white supremacy and ‘civilisation’ (Jochelson, 2001: 50–5, 130). Accordingly, a policy of urban racial residential segregation was increasingly urgently implemented, beginning with the Natives’ (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 and gathering momentum in the 1930s when economic depression and savage drought drove increasing numbers of poor whites and poor blacks to seek refuge in the urban slums (Parnell, 1993). A further peril associated with unregulated urbanization in general and the urban slums in particular was African ‘detribalization’, which posed additional social and political threats to white domination. As Jochelson and Vaughan note, the entire process of urbanization for Africans was defined as pathological, and needing to be arrested or reversed (Jochelson, 2001: 112–28). Thus the presence of a settler society and more so of a large number of poor whites imposed radically different constraints on and opportunities for the processes of migrancy and immigration to that experienced in an Indian context. It is to this that we can ultimately attribute their different trajectories.

India – Culture, Migration and Urbanization

Migrant cultures have not been the subject of such close attention in India. This seems to be partly due to a greater divorce between urban and rural studies in India (although the same dichotomy was also a conspicuous feature of much South African scholarship), and partly due to the different preoccupations of
social anthropologists working in the two countries, something that in itself warrants explanation. Beyond that, however, one distinctive feature of South African historiography since the late 1970s, as was noted earlier, has been its reliance on oral testimonies documenting a wide spectrum of life experiences. Use of oral testimony (above all in the form of life histories) is a far less pronounced feature of Indian historiography and social sciences. One major reason for this, as Sumit Sarkar (2007) explains, is the abundance of vernacular texts that are available to illuminate India’s past. But beyond that, Bhattacharya (2006) suggests a question of proclivity. Referring to subaltern studies, he observes a preference for written sources, which he feels cannot reveal the full picture. ‘The sources used by cultural historians’, Bhattacharya claims, ‘emanate from literate elite groups, and “reading against the grain” does not take one very far. Features attributed in this elite discourse are aggregated in “popular culture”, disregarding internal diversities’. ‘Little work,’ he concludes, ‘found on historical evidence has emerged in the area’ (Bhattacharya, 2006: 14–15). The anthropologist Arjaan de Haan amplifies these propositions. ‘In the absence of a lively oral history tradition’, he asserts, ‘few anthropological or sociological studies of labour exist’ (de Haan, 2004: 190, note 2, 192).

One distinction widely noted in the literature is between northern and eastern Indian cities where single-male migration predominated, and western and especially southern Indian cities where family migration was far more common. Rowe follows Muckerjee in suggesting that one important reason for this variation is the extent to which northern Indian cities were primarily colonial creations. Muckerjee specifically proposes that southern India was least touched by colonialism and most closely corresponded to the traditional model (Muckerjee, 1961; Rowe, 1973: 233; see also Prakash Rao, 1983: 9–15). It is a short step from here to suggest that the more traditional social structure and culture of India’s southern cities is in some way responsible for more family-based migration and more even sex ratios, a pattern also apparent in southern migration to cities elsewhere in India. The city of Pune, for example, attracted large numbers of Tamil-speaking migrants during and after the Second World War – 64.8 per cent of one sample of these immigrants were single or unmarried on arrival. Ten years later, 66 per cent were married and living in nuclear families (Nair, 1978: 23). The bulk of South Indian migrants to Pune were educated and involved in white-collar work. In other Indian cities, a close correlation existed between higher-income occupations and more settled urban family units, and this may be another example of the same pattern (see, for example, Kumar Bawa, 1980: 65; Joshi, 2003: 95, 102). In the southern city of Bangalore, however, a different kind of family migration was evident. Here, a phenomenal rate of urban growth between the 1940s and 1960s was propelled by Tamil-speaking pariah (untouchable) immigrants from Madras state. Like poorer migrants in other Indian cities, they lived in slums located close to industrial sites. Unlike other
North Indian cities, however, they arrived in nuclear families or soon brought their wives (Rowe, 1973: 235–9; Prakash Rao, 1983: 49–50, 227–44; for Madras see Lewandowski, 1980: 52, 93). Finally in Calcutta and Bhilai, de Haan and Parry observe almost exactly the same pattern. De Haan (2004: 200) notes: ‘Telugu from Andrah Pradesh and South Orissa tended to move with their entire families ... to [take] up work in the factories’ in the Titagarh industrial suburb of greater Calcutta. Likewise, Parry (2004: 225) documents southerners (especially Tamils and Telugus) very quickly bringing their wives and children to Bhilai, northerners only sometimes following suit considerably later, a trend which he claims, following Crook (1993), to have been visible as far back as the census of 1911.

Various reasons have been advanced to account for this pattern, such as unfavourable economic conditions and the oppressive nature of rural society for those from pastoral and agricultural castes. These, however, do not in and of themselves offer a complete explanation, since impoverished untouchables in northern India did not evince a similar inclination. Parry (2004: 225) suggests that the divergent patterns may have been born of different features of industrialization in North and South India, South Indian industries having been generally ‘light and evincing more of a demand for women’s labour’, but also considers ‘different gender norms’ to have possibly been instrumental. Rowe (1973: 241) likewise concludes that the most plausible explanation is likely to reside in social structures and cultural systems: ‘The different family systems, the degree of authoritative strength held by the extended family ... ties to other castes in the rural social system and ties to the land’. Rowe suspects, for example, the Bhayias in northern India were more linked or cemented into the North Indian social system compared to pariahs in the South, who were demonstrably more marginal. Breman (1974) provides solid evidence of the same in his study of jajmani (patronage) in South Gujarat. Both groups of untouchables encountered problems in escaping the rural social mesh, but southern pariahs were more inclined to try and when they did leave, were more likely to make a decisive break, taking with them their wives and families, who, in contrast to higher-caste Brahmins and others, were expected and allowed to engage in remunerated work. We might conclude then that those retaining rights in land were most likely to engage in seasonal oscillatory migration, while those stripped of those rights would not initially have possessed the resources or freedom to engage in such a practice but would ultimately be most likely to cut their moorings from the rural social order.

Migrant Labour, Urbanization and Social Stability

In South African historical and social science scholarship, oscillating labour migrancy is widely credited with the responsibility for chronic family instability and a host of associated social ills, both in the countryside and in the towns. The male migrants’ increasingly extended absences from home, their failure to
remit money and their occasional reluctance to return to their rural families have all been factors prompting single but married women to migrate to the towns. There, the absence of employment opportunities for women, together with hugely unbalanced sex ratios and the subfamily subsistence wages paid to mainly migrant males, encouraged them to engage in serial relationships with men, the illicit brewing of liquor and sometimes prostitution. Children born in such circumstances were largely schooled on the streets and turned in growing numbers to juvenile delinquency. By the 1940s, the ubiquitous tsotsi was making his presence felt in most South African towns, fuelling a rising incidence of violence and criminality (Glaser, 2000: 20–183).

The contrast between this and the literature describing social life in India’s main industrial cities is stark. There male migrancy was equally pronounced, but family life survived relatively intact. On the one hand, the overwhelming majority of the wives of Indian male migrants to the towns remained firmly locked in the bosom of their joint families and rooted in rural homes. So unappealing were living conditions in the towns that, as one Calcutta labour historian writes, ‘the choice was seen as one between family life in degrading circumstances or separation from their families for lengthy periods of time’ (Sen, 1999: 132). In North and West India, at least, the latter decision was invariably taken. Few married men took their wives to the urban areas and few single women of the sort so visible in South Africa were sufficiently headstrong or desperate to undertake the risky venture to the towns. Nevertheless, and on the other hand, from the earliest days of the cities a proportion of urban job seekers settled permanently in the towns, increasingly so after 1961 (Mukerjee and Singh, 1961: 52). Immigrants from South and East India, as had been discussed earlier, featured prominently in this move and either migrated as family units or soon brought their spouses to join them. Again single women did not migrate. Across India, North and South, East and West, it was ‘unthinkable for rural women to come alone and earn a livelihood’ (Prakash Rao, 1983: 34). In Lucknow, to take one example, only a tiny number of females migrated independently to town (Mukerjee and Singh, 1961: 71). In Kanpur, to take another, only a miniscule number of widows and divorcees, who had lost their rights in rural areas, sought employment in the mills in the town (Joshi, 2003: 13).

In general, sexual behaviour among men and women who ended up in the towns is depicted in the urban literature as restrained. Gore’s (1970: 17) study of Bombay records very few casual ‘illicit’ relationships between men and women. Desai and Pillay’s (1970: 171) account of a Bombay slum contrasts the relative stability of family life which they observed there with the high levels of social disorganization and family breakdown in Latin American slums. Other Indian urban centres exhibited more or less the same characteristics. In Pune, for example, declining social observances are recorded alongside the breakdown of taboos, with the outstanding exceptions of marriage (Gadgil,
1952: 184–222). In a number of slum areas, desertion, clandestine prostitution and the occasional illicit relationship are recorded, but on an unexpectedly circumscribed scale (Department of Economics, University of Bombay, 1970: 173–5; Desai and Pillay, 1972: 160, 171, 221–2; Sinha, 1972: 93, 96; Majumdar and Majumdar, 1978: 26, 147–9; Prakash Rao, 1983: 93, 100, 145–6, 153).

Yet such perspectives, as Amita Sen in particular shows, have been inscribed and have survived in the historical record largely by default. A male academy, with few exceptions, has produced a blinkered and culturally conditioned view of Indian women in colonial society and history. Through such lenses Indian women typically emerge as bystanders, lacking agency and mute, their behaviour or their absence not requiring serious explanation. In the urban context, as Amita Sen (1999: 4) observes, ‘it has not even been asked why the Indian working class became overwhelmingly male’. Sen, by contrast, sets out to highlight and interrogate the largely unstated assumptions that have served virtually by default to explain why so many Indian women remained rooted in rural homes. The core elements that she identifies are brahminical prescriptions about the seclusion of women to domestic space (purdah), child marriage, an insistence on chastity and related recoil from pollution and a prohibition on widow remarriage. These served both to confine Indian women within their homes and to render them utterly beholden to dominant men. They were thus simultaneously imprisoned and imprisoned themselves.

On closer examination, however, as Sen and others show, these social practices and cultural prescriptions turn out to be in no way primordial. Sen cites O’Hanlon and others to show that the 19th century witnessed a gradual brahminization of Hindu society. Castes that had never practised strict purdah or child marriage and had permitted divorce, remarriage and widow remarriage, now adopted them with a vengeance, mainly to assert a higher social and political position. As striking and significant, dowry replaced bride wealth in marriage transactions. Such shifts in behaviour, Sen argues, mirrored a progression of devaluing women’s work and hence women’s status in rural Indian society. Thus a number of the seemingly eternal verities of Indian society turn out to be constructed and contrived, and lacking the authority of an unchanging tradition (Sen, 1999: 64–88). This, nevertheless, made them in no way less potent. Moreover, as Sen shows, such changes explain why men controlled decisions to migrate to towns, why men migrated rather than women and why women’s labour and status continued to diminish as men earned the critical cash needed for rent and to pay debts and women’s work was domesticized and leached of all economic value. Indeed, as Sen’s work shows, the steady slide of Indian women’s positions in rural society, especially its lower orders, underscores the power of invented or appropriated social conventions and traditions.

Indian women, above all widows (who constituted an astonishing quarter of all rural Indian women in 19th-century Bengal), faced increasingly dismal and
hopeless conditions (Sen, 1999: 181). In reality indeed they had more and more incentive to flee to the towns. Most did not, but as Sen again remarks, a minority did. These generally highly marginalized women often abandoned their rural households in the company of men. These men, however, were rarely their husbands, and such women were at best able to construct what Sen (1999: 199) calls temporary marriages. In instances where such men occupied better-paying jobs of spinners and weavers, they sought to lock their temporary and highly insecure wives into ‘a new form of purdah’ (de Haan, 2004: 201) which generally took the form, so Sen (1999: 39) notes, of ‘incarceration in tiny airless cubicles’ in the mill town. Often they were dumped when these men returned ‘home’. Otherwise women sought various kinds of employment, such as working in the mills, but also prostitution. Since such women, in the words of a contemporary sociologist, could not ‘live or in many cases work without male protection’, they entered liaisons with men (Sen, 1999: 186). As a consequence ‘jute women became symbols of infamy and depravation’, and were placed in the same bracket as prostitutes. So indeed were virtually all urban working women, ranging from domestics to cooks, needlewomen and laundresses, stigmatized as engaging in ‘clandestine prostitution’ (Sen, 1999: 197). Elite male commentators saw them as purveyors of disease, practitioners or associates of crime and generally as the scourge of the city (Sen, 1999: 177).

This snapshot of Calcutta is not so far removed from the picture presented earlier of the Witwatersrand’s multiracial slums and black townships. The main difference on the Witwatersrand is that white women laboured while black women were confined to informal income-earning activities. In Johannesburg, the worlds of the white Afrikaner women factory worker and the African women beer brewer, childminder or laundress are curiously intermingled. What is so radically different in each case, however, are the numbers involved: a massive movement of women in the case of South Africa, a miniscule movement in the case of most Indian towns. The contrast is striking and still needs to be more adequately explained. How typical Calcutta is or is not of other towns also probably still warrants further investigation.

Juvenile delinquency, which is often regarded as a key marker of social instability, has been far less conspicuous in Indian cities than in South Africa. In 1930, an educational commentator remarked that ‘thousands of children’ in Bombay were born into homes in which parental control and guidance were almost completely lacking. Their primary education was that of the streets. They got from it a certain superficial sharpness, but little knowledge that could be of service in the business of life, and less than no discipline (cited in Chandavarkar, 1994: 170). This observation could have been repeated word for word about many South African cities in the 1940s. In the case of India’s cities, nevertheless, it does not seem to have produced large-scale juvenile delinquency, along with the massive sexual violence that became increasingly pervasive in South Africa’s towns. The reasons for this are entirely opaque.
India’s social historians and sociologists are largely silent on the subject. They recognize that urban families have become pared down to their nuclear core, as compared to their extended counterparts in the countryside (Joshi, 2003: 102, citing RCLI, 1931), but they then broadly make the assumption that this unit is stable and natural. The issue of explaining stability simply does not arise. Beyond that, generational discussions are rarely the subject of 20th-century Indian urban studies.

It is possible that a growing literature on crime may embrace – and mask – some of these issues. Joshi’s seminal study on the North Indian cotton-milling town of Kanpur, for example, highlights the activities of *goondas* in that town. Officially defined as ‘hooligan, bully, rogue or *badmash*’, *goondas* led gangs that were involved in a variety of money-making and often criminal activities. Youths were presumably members of such gangs, but figure, in the absence of any close analysis or explanation, as exceptions to the non-delinquent rule.

In Bombay and Kanpur, gymnasia (*akhadas*) provided an important social and sometimes political focus for urban youth and, as Chandavarkar notes, they also provided the basis for street gangs. His next remark that the youth were often pulled into more general political (and communal) activities, typifies the slide that occurs in most Indian studies, where they feature as an integral part of the history of communal violence, but rarely as a social force in their own right. In Calcutta, gymnasia and *goondas* combined into a fearful force. Their criminal enterprises expanded to such a point that the Bengal government passed a ‘Goonda Act’ in 1926 in an effort to rein them in. *Goondas* were concentrated in Calcutta’s *bustees* and controlled liquor and gambling dens, prostitution, drugs and pickpocketing and burglary rings. Studies of the history sheets of *goondas* compiled by the Calcutta Police show many *goondas* to be migrants to the city who had lost their fathers in their youth, but one gets little sense of dislocated urban families providing an important conduit into their ranks (Nandi, 1991).

In India the insecurity of urban life sustained high levels of single-male migrancy, especially in the North. Only in the 1960s and 1970s did a trend towards more permanent settlement begin to assert itself. Even then migrancy remained widespread. Housing shortages and job instability required single, male migrants to seek intermediary mechanisms through which to enhance their access to both resources or to cushion them in times of unemployment and other kinds of distress. A wide range of patrons emerged to fulfil these needs. The jobber or *sirdar* was the most prominent of these, but grain dealers (*banias*) and neighbourhood bosses (*dadas*) also played similar roles. The networks that they constructed were almost always rural village/neighborhood/caste or communally based. In this way both occupational categories and urban residential areas became colonized by groups from particular regions (Chandavarkar, 1994: 172–200).

In part this represented cultural continuity, since particular jobs had historically been performed by specific castes. However, there are too many
examples of occupational drift as castes decoupled themselves from inapposite job categories within a more diverse and fluid urban setting for this to be considered the main cause (for example Bose, 1973: 29). More important were the general exigencies of urban life. It was because of these that Bose found employment in Calcutta concentrated by regional origin and described the city as an archipelago of ‘cultural islands’ (Bose, 1973). Much the same could be said of Bombay. The Joshis identify ‘differential corridors of migration’ to Bombay and ‘the specialization of migrants from different areas in different industries and occupations’ (Joshi and Joshi, 1976: 134). Rowe (1973: 228) writes that it was ‘almost as if a map of North Indian districts was reproduced within the wards of (Bombay) city’. Bombay and Calcutta were admittedly the most heterogeneous cities in India (Gore, 1970: 228), but even in less diverse northern cities such as Kanpur ‘the struggle for jobs often took the form of community cohesion’ while ‘the authority of the mistri or jobber tended to solidify such loyalties’ (Joshi, 1985: 22).

Such regional, communal or even caste patronage networks were not solely the preserve of single, male migrants in northern and eastern industrial towns. In Madras where family settlement was common, a self-conscious ‘simulation’ of the regional culture of origin occurred within the new urban setting. Nair goes so far as to claim that simulation was ‘fullest’ where family migration was the dominant pattern and that the length of residence in urban areas tended ‘to strengthen ethnic identity’ rather than the reverse. Here, in contrast to western urbanization, he sees ‘integration without assimilation’ (Nair, 1978). Barnett introduces a significant variation on the same theme. She suggests that southern towns, particularly Madras, presented unequal opportunities to different castes, resulting in a comparative loss of status for ‘non-Brahmins’ as opposed to Brahmins, which in turn led to a recrafting, even invention, of a non-Brahmin Dravidian and later Tamil identity (Barnett, 1976: 16–25, 314–27).

In Johannesburg, and more generally in the urban agglomeration of the Witwatersrand, some significant similarities and differences to this pattern can be discerned. Like Bombay, this was the most ethnically/regionally heterogeneous urban centre in South Africa. Like Bombay, migrancy and more settled urban life existed side by side. Like Bombay, Calcutta and other Indian cities, a measure of ethnic occupational clustering occurred among its black population. Richards’s survey of pass records for the late 1930s and early 1940s, for example, shows that Johannesburg’s building workers were drawn disproportionately from the Transkei, municipal workers from East Griqualand and Tembuland, commercial workers from the Orange Free State farms and industrial workers from Basotuland and particular parts of Zululand (Bonner, 2004a: 235).

Here the similarity ends. Patrons, who were indispensable for individual or group survival in Indian cities, were barely visible in South Africa. Migrants
were recruited through centralized recruitment agencies, or alternatively found jobs through relatives or friends. No jobber needed to intervene. The practice narrated by Majumdar and Majumdar in respect of Delhi, whereby jobs rotated between men from the same village, was even more typical of South Africa (where for many years they could even illicitly rotate the same pass) (Majumdar and Majumdar, 1978: 120). White South Africa’s endeavour to curb African migration also meant that black employees were channelled into state-managed and state-licensed housing. This again meant that no intermediary patron was required. A partial exception can be made of Johannesburg’s inner-city slums, but here housing stock was accessed through white slumlords who had no vested interest in sustaining an ethnic or regional patronage network. The only times a situation similar to those typical of Indian cities arose were during the bursts of unregulated urbanization which occurred in the 1940s and 1980s when invasions of public land were initiated by black immigrants to the city. At these points classic patron-type figures, often heading ethnic networks, emerged; the best known of whom is the founder of modern Soweto, James Sofazonke Mpanza (Bonner and Segal, 1998: 20–8). For the rest, state-regulated urbanization closed down the space that such figures could occupy. One possible intriguing consequence of this was the phenomenon of ‘detribalization’ in which a common black urban culture was forged, of which *marabi* music was the icon. If that could be more conclusively established to be the case, the value of this comparative exercise would be affirmed.

**Conclusion**

This comparison of patterns of Indian and South African urbanization suggests that both literatures might benefit from an interrogation informed by a knowledge of the other. The South African literature needs to be re-examined above all in relation to the dynamics underlying its migrant labour system, and the purported social consequences of labour migrancy. The Indian literature, for its part, needs to problematize family stability and to pay closer attention to the neglected issue of generation. Both would benefit from a further comparison of cultural contexts. Beyond the scope of this investigation, but also hugely important, are the different political implications of these similar but divergent patterns of urbanization – not least, the critical issue of communalism, which only really reared its head in South Africa in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

**Note**

1. More detailed studies confirmed these findings. For Bombay, see Zachariah (1964: 14), Bulsara (1964: 11), Gore (1970: 56), Chandavarkar (1994: 125); for Calcutta see Sen (1960: 2,

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